REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)*	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)*
05-15-2014	FINAL	

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
The Self-Development Domain: The Forgotten Domain of Leader Development	
	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER

6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
Joseph M. Byerly	5e. TASK NUMBER
Paper Advisor: Christopher Connolly	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207	

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited. Reference: DOD Directive 5230.24

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the Naval War College faculty in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.

14. ABSTRACT

Today, the individual branches of the Armed Forces recognize the importance of self-development as a critical component on the continuum of leader development. However, beyond reading lists, the various services do very little to assist individuals in their personal study of war and warfare. Individuals currently lack the incentives to deepen their knowledge on an ongoing basis. A professional military society would provide the required extrinsic motivation by creating a network of life-long learners, who are intrinsically motivated to deepen their knowledge and supplement their experiences of war and warfare by interacting on an ongoing basis, thereby strengthening their own individual self-development in multiple ways. First, the practice of community-based learning within the military has worked before, and those who participated greatly benefited from the practice. Second, it would support participants to organically cultivate relationships by creating personal learning networks and connecting mentors to mentees. Finally, it would help individuals avoid some common pitfalls associated with self-study and assist in the development of critical thinking skills.

15. SUBJECT TERMS

Self-Study, Leader Development, Military Society, Community-Based Learning

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Dept
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER *(include area code)*
UNCLASSIFIED	UNCLASSIFIED	UNCLASSIFIED		14	401-841-3556

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

The Self-Development Domain:
The Forgotten Domain of Leader Development

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the
requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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Signature: _____

15 May 2014

Contents

Abstract

Today, the individual branches of the Armed Forces recognize the importance of self-development as a critical component on the continuum of leader development. However, beyond reading lists, the various services do very little to assist individuals in their personal study of war and warfare. Individuals currently lack the incentives to deepen their knowledge on an ongoing basis. A professional military society would provide the required extrinsic motivation by creating a network of life-long learners, who are intrinsically motivated to deepen their knowledge and supplement their experiences of war and warfare by interacting on an ongoing basis, thereby strengthening their own individual self-development in multiple ways. First, the practice of community-based learning within the military has worked before, and those who participated greatly benefited from the practice. Second, it would support participants to organically cultivate relationships by creating personal learning networks and connecting mentors to mentees. Finally, it would help individuals avoid some common pitfalls associated with self-study and assist in the development of critical thinking skills.

Introduction

In the late summer of 1944, as Third Army raced across Western Europe, General

George S. Patton Jr. addressed his staff with the following comments, "I have studied the

German all my life. I have read the memoirs of his general officers and political leaders. I

have even read his philosophers…I have studied in detail the accounts of every damned one

of his battles. I know exactly how he will react under any given set of

circumstances...Therefore, when the day comes, I'm going whip the hell out of him!"[1]

Significantly, Patton's effort to undertake the study of the German military and political

history wasn't accomplished in professional military education courses or through a unit's

professional development program, it was accomplished through an intense personal study

that began decades before he stepped foot on European soil.

General Patton shared a common theme with other great captains and theoreticians of

war – a dedication to a personal study of the art and science of war and warfare. From

Clausewitz to Patton, Mahan to McMaster, the level of expertise attained by these individuals

came only after intense intellectual preparation that spanned their careers. Roger H. Nye,

author of *The Patton Mind: The Professional Development of an Extraordinary Leader*,

opines "those who achieved greatness did so outside of school through a very intense and

lifelong self-study of their profession."[2]

Today, self-development is recognized as a critical component on the continuum of

leader development by the individual branches of the Armed Forces.[3] However, beyond

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[1] Roger Nye, *The Patton Mind: The Professional Development of an Extraordinary Leader*, (New York: Avery, 1993), 92.
[2] Ibid., X.
[3] While all the branches mention self-development in their leadership doctrine and strategies, only the Army and Navy discuss how experience, training, and education interact within this domain. The focus of this paper is on the education component of self development, which can be characterized by self-study and professional reading.

reading lists, the various services do very little to assist individuals in their personal study of war and warfare. Individuals currently lack the incentives to deepen their knowledge on an ongoing basis. For example, even though Chief of Staff of the Army, General Raymond Odierno, encourages Soldiers to "discuss, debate, and think critically"[4] in the introduction to his reading list, unless individuals are in units that spend a considerable amount of time on professional discourse, there is no extrinsic motivation to continually deepen their knowledge and expertise. While there isn't a wealth of academic literature on life-long learning and the military profession, a civilian study published in 2011 posited that two vital components of self-development are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The study shows that recognition by mentors and peers both online and/or offline supported these motivations.[5] A professional military society would provide the required extrinsic motivation by creating a network of life-long learners, who are intrinsically motivated to deepen their knowledge and supplement their experiences of war and warfare by interacting on an ongoing basis, thereby strengthening their own individual self-development.

Scope

A professional military society, as envisioned in this paper, is a community of practice focused on the study of war and warfare. It would be open to all members of the military profession, including uniformed personnel, government officials, and professors from the professional military education system. Eitenne Wegner, a leading researcher on communities of practice, defines them as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this

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[4] The U.S. Army Chief of Staff's Professional Reading List: http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/105/105-1-1/CMH_Pub_105-5-1_2014.pdf.
[5] Jaitip Na-songkhla, *Flexible Learning in a Workplace Model:*. (lecture., Chulalongkorn University, 2011), http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED515883.pdf.

area by interacting on an ongoing basis."[6] It doesn't matter if interactions take place online or offline – the key is constant interaction driven by a willingness to participate. Such an organization would strengthen the self-development domain in multiple ways. First, the practice of community-based learning within the military has worked before, and those who participated greatly benefited from the practice. Second, it would support participants to organically cultivate relationships by creating personal learning networks and connecting mentors to mentees. Finally, it would help individuals avoid some common pitfalls associated with self-study and assist in the development of critical thinking skills.

Historical Precedents

This concept of a professional military society is not a new one. There are historical as well as more recent examples that demonstrate its effectiveness in the self-development domain. The Prussians developed the *Militarishe Gesellschaft* in 1801 in Berlin, which educated an entire generation of officers and eventually led to major reforms in the Prussian military. More recently, in the U.S. Army, Company Command and Platoon Leader online professional forums, communities of practice built around small unit leadership, have led to increased effectiveness among leaders, as they carried out their duties as commanders and platoon leaders.

In the summer of 1801, a small group within the Prussian military came together, and as stated by their bylaws, created an institution "to instruct its members through the exchange of ideas in all areas of the art of war, in a manner that would encourage them to seek out truth, that would avoid the difficulties of private study with its tendency to one-sidedness,

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[6] Wegner, Etienne, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder. *Cultivating Communities of Practice*. (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 4.

and that would seem best suited to place theory and practice in its proper relationship."[7] The

Militarische Gesellschaft (Military Society) was founded in Berlin by Gerhard Johann David

von Scharnhorst and a few fellow officers to address the issue of a dogmatic adherence to

doctrine and lack of professional study among its officer corps.[8] Their members included

officers, government officials, and members from the academic community who met over

180 times and ultimately disbanded in 1805 due to the mobilization during the Napoleonic

Wars. Their weekly meetings consisted of the presentation of professional papers, book

reviews, and a discussion of military related topics posed by its members; also, each year

they conducted an operational analysis of a past battle.[9] In addition to their weekly

discourse, they hosted essay competitions and published a professional journal available to

its members titled *Proceedings*.

The society provided a strong intellectual climate that stimulated its members'

thinking and personal development, setting the foundation for great individual and

organizational achievement.[10] Its members, who included historic figures such as Carl von

Clausewitz, August Neidhart von Gneisenau, and Gerhard Scharnhorst formed the core group

of leaders that quickly reformed the Prussian military following their defeat at the hands of

Napoleon in 1806.[11]   Sixty percent of its 182 members, half of whom joined as junior

officers, became generals. Five of the eight Prussian Chiefs of Staff from 1830-1870 were

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[7] Charles White, *The Enlightened Soldier: Scharnhorst and the Militarische Gesellschaft in Berlin 1801-1805*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 191.
[8] Ibid., 36.
[9] Ibid., 45.
[10] While correlations between the loss to Napoleon in 1806 and the Militarische Gesellschaft are outside the scope of this paper, it is important to address that prior to 1806, the Prussian military culture, organization, strategies, and tactics were all dominated by concepts inherited from Frederick the Great. This rigid adherence to tradition by the majority of the Prussian officer corps negated any of the initial benefits gained by individuals from the military society. It wasn't until after the Prussian defeat that the society's members moved into positions of key leadership, thus capitalizing on the relationships and education cultivated and developed prior to the outbreak of war.
[11] Ibid., 207.

also members.[12] This is significant considering the end of this period is when the Prussian

military grew to dominate Europe.

The primary medium for discourse within the Prussian military society was face-to-

face interaction. Today, many communities of practice rely on online forums for discourse

due to the geographic dispersion of their members. A great example of this practice is

demonstrated by the Company Command and Platoon Leader Professional Forums.

Since 2000, CompanyCommand.mil and Platoonleader.mil have provided an online

space for company-level leaders in the Army to discuss problems, share tools, and

disseminate best practices. It's a community of practice built around small unit leadership.

In their book, *CompanyCommand: Unleashing the Power of the Army Profession,* the

founders of the two websites highlight that the online space benefits the individual's

development "by serving as a switchboard connecting present, future, and past company

commanders in ways that improve their professional competence."[13] In addition to a small

full-time staff, based out of West Point, NY, a group of motivated Active Duty and National

Guard volunteers from across the Army work behind the scenes as moderators to ensure the

conversations stays fresh, and the sites remain relevant.

The forums also host a reading program called the Professional Reading Challenge,

which gives company commanders the ability to blend face-to-face interaction with online

discourse. Along with promoting reading, the program encourages members to capture their

ideas in writing on the message boards. Recently, the forums added an interactive feature

they call The Leader Challenge. Using video interviews of officers from deployments in

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[12] Ibid., 49.

[13] Nancy Dixon, Nate Allen, Tony Burgess, Pete Kilner, and Steve Schweitzer, *CompanyCommand: Unleashing the Power of the Army Profession*, (West Point: Center for the Advacement of Leader Development and Organizational Learning, 2005), 16.

Afghanistan and Iraq, forum members are presented with a real-life vignette and asked to respond with what they would do if they were in the same scenario. After responding, members are able to read others' responses and listen to what happened in the original scenario.[14] This process allows leaders to continue to learn from a challenging event which may have taken place four or five years ago. Another benefit of membership in the forums is contributing to the featured monthly discussions. The discussions range from hot-button leadership issues to calls for ideas on developing training plans. With the permission of the participants, the site administrators edit and compile the posts to create a monthly themed article for *Army Magazine* which addresses important issues for current and future company commanders and platoon leaders. The process exposes young leaders to the practice of writing for professional journals. Many of those who were featured in the *Army Magazine* articles continue writing for publication in other journals and outlets.

Both the *Militarische Gesellschaft* and the Company Command and Platoon Leader Forums are great examples of how communities of practice assist in the development of its members by encouraging professional reading, writing, and discourse. As individuals become more active within these communities, they develop personal learning networks.

The Power of Networks

Connecting service men and women through a professional military society would help individuals create personal learning networks (PLNs). In their 2011 book, *Personal Learning Networks: Using the Power of Connections to Transform Education*, Will Richardson and Rob Mancabelli define a PLN as "a set of connections to people and

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[14] The Company Command website has a thorough explanation of the Leader Challenge at
http://companycommand.army.mil/

resources both offline and online who enrich our learning –at a moment's notice."[15] PLNs provide access to a networked group of people with varying degrees of experience and expertise, who supply each other with information, offer discussion, feedback, and motivation, thus enhancing their endeavors in professional growth.[16]

Connecting with others in the same units may be ideal for professional debate and discussion. The reality however, is that there are those whom serve in units where leaders are either too busy or don't see the benefits of personal study, thereby making self-study an individual effort – and may even discourage those with the initial motivation. By joining a professional military society, service members can augment the lack of offline learning networks with online connections.

Many leaders already do this by connecting with others via social media platforms such as Twitter and/or Facebook. For example, in addition to following professional journals and staying abreast of the latest articles, users could follow and interact with unmanned systems expert and *Wired for War* author, Peter Singer, or Lawrence Freedman, a professor at Kings College and author of *Strategy: A History*. With the integration of mobile devices into society's daily life, these interactions are literally at users' finger tips. While connecting, through social media outlets, with popular authors and experts may be easily accomplished, finding and connecting with fellow, intrinsically-motivated military professionals could prove troublesome. A professional military society would bring leaders interested in a personal study of war and warfare together, thus creating a large pool of professionals to connect with, who share similar learning goals. Additionally, it would open the door for mentor/mentee relationships to develop.

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[15] Will Richardson, and Rob Mancabelli, *Personal Learning Networks: Using the Power of Connections to Transform Education*, (Bloomington: Solution Tree Press, 2011), 2.
[16] Ibid, 32.

The Impact of Mentors

A professional military society would also help younger members of the profession connect with more experienced members, thereby creating and fostering mentor/mentee relationships. While some might focus on the negative aspects of mentoring in the military, such as nepotism and the development of a "good old boy network", the benefits of these relationships greatly outweigh the potential negative impacts. An often overlooked aspect of self development is the role that mentors can play in guiding a leader's personal study. General (ret) David Petreaus, reflecting on the role his mentor played in his self development, commented that "General Galvin both encouraged me to get out of my intellectual comfort zone by going to grad school vice another infantry assignment, and he also suggested a number of books over the years – some that were classics in history or our profession, some that caught his eye at the time. He was a life-long student and encouraged me to be the same."[17]

History is rife with examples of mentors who shaped the study habits and assisted their mentees along the way. Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), author of *On War*, is known as one of the greatest military theorists, but his rise to intellectual immortality was not an individual effort. Gerhard Johann David von Scharnhorst (1755-1813) played an instrumental role in developing Clausewitz' theory of war from the time Carl entered the Berlin Institute up to Scharnhorst's untimely death in 1813. On reflection about her husband's time at the Institute, Marie von Clausewitz wrote, "At first it was very difficult for him to follow the lectures because he lacked the necessary prerequisite knowledge. He was near despair, and might have given up on the troublesome undertaking if Scharnhorst had not taken notice of him early and encouraged him with such characteristic kindness and

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[17] Interview with General(ret) David Petreaus on March 26, 2014

empathy."[18] During their time together at the Berlin Institute the relationship between the two

men grew from teacher and pupil to mentor and mentee. In a biography on Clausewitz, titled

Clausewitz and the State, Peter Paret examines the influence Scharnhorst had on his mentee

and writes, "Scharnhorst's conviction that the study of history must lie at the center of any

advanced study of war confirmed Clausewitz's tentative attitudes on military theory and on

the role of education, and *guided them further*."[19] It was the mentorship of Scharnhorst that

aided a struggling military student to become the top student of his class at the Berlin

Institute in 1804.[20]

Another great example of the role mentorship plays in self-study can be found during

the interwar years in the United States Army. Most military professionals know who George

S. Patton, Jr. and Dwight D. Eisenhower are, but few recognize the name Fox Conner, a man

that was instrumental in the lives of the two famous military figures. During a chance

encounter on a train ride in the fall of 1913, Captain Fox Conner met a young Lieutenant

Patton and the two immediately found a common interest in history, literature, and

knowledge in general.[21] The two remained in contact for years, and while visiting Patton at

Fort Meade in 1919, Conner met Patton's neighbor, Dwight Eisenhower. As Conner and

Eisenhower got to know each other, Conner became impressed with Eisenhower and invited

him to serve as his executive officer in Panama.[22] After Eisenhower joined him in Panama,

Conner realized that the young officer wasn't prone to personal study, and began offering

him books from his library. In addition to providing books, Connor also engaged him in

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[18] White, The Enlightened Soldier, 101.

[19] Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 71.

[20] Ibid., 76.

[21] Edward Cox, *Grey Eminence: Fox Conner and the Art of Mentorship*. (manuscript., The Institute of Land Warfare, 2010), http://www.ausa.org/publications/ilw/Documents/LWP 78W Fox Conner.pdf.

[22] Diana Bodner, "The Relationship Between Fox Conner and Dwight Eisenhower." (master\., The U.S. Army War College, 2002).

discourse about the topics in which he read, thereby helping Eisenhower gain a deeper

understanding of the subject matter. Eisenhower later claimed that his discussions with

Conner were "a sort of graduate school in military affairs and the humanities, leavened by the

comments and discourses of a man who was experienced in his knowledge of men and their

conduct."[23] If not for Conner's mentorship, Eisenhower may not have been intellectually

prepared for the future roles he would later play in world history.

The above examples relied on both individuals being in the right place at the right

time. A professional military society would provide a rally point, where members could

interact via online forums, thus creating opportunities for mentors and mentees to connect

and move that relationship from the online to the physical realm.

Since 2003, Army Major Jonathan Silk has been a member of the platoon leader and

company command professional forums. Over time, he has witnessed several offline

mentor/mentee relationships develop out of online discussion threads. Additionally, several

of his personal mentors were leaders he met through the online professional forum over a

decade ago. He believes that these interactions have fueled his passion for learning and

education.[24] His experiences, along with that of other leaders, are evidence that mentors and

mentees can connect via an online medium.

Pitfalls of Self-Study without Discourse

Additionally, a professional military society would help individuals avoid some

common pitfalls associated with self-study by providing access to experts in various fields of

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[23] Mark Bender, *Watershed at Leavenworth: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Command and General Staff School*. (manuscript., Combat Studies Institute, 1990), .

[24] Interview with Major Jonathan Silk on March 30, 2014. In 2010, Jon accepted a position to work full-time for the Center for the Advancement of Leader Development and Organizational Learning at USMA. He received his Masters in learning technologies from Pepperdine and continues to mentor younger members of the profession via platoonleader.mil and companycommand.mil

study. Dr. Milan Vego, a professor at the Naval War College and author of several books and articles on operational art, wrote "a study of military history in all of its aspects, *if properly done* is perhaps the single most important source of lessons learned [for military leaders]."[25] However, if self-study is approached incorrectly it might be more dangerous than if one did not read any of the books on the published reading lists.[26] Sir John P. Kiszely, a retired British Lieutenant General and former head of the UK Defence Academy, argued for "the necessity for military professionals to be guided and mentored in their study of military history."[27]

Two of these pitfalls are learning the wrong lessons from history and using selective readings to reinforce one's prejudices. In examining each of these common pitfalls, it is easy for one to see how a professional military society can help an individual avoid them.

Learning the wrong lessons is frequently a result of studying historical cases out of their proper context.[28] In order to understand a war, decisions made, or the actions of those fighting, one must understand the backdrop in which the fighting took place. As the British historian, Sir Michael Howard, once wrote, "The roots of victory and defeat often have to be sought far from the battlefield, in political, social, and economic factors which explain why armies are constituted as they are, and why their leaders conduct them in the way they do."[29] For example, if one reads *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya to Vietnam* by John Nagl without understanding the context of the Malayan

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[25] Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice*, (Newport: U.S. Naval War College, 2009), XI-165.
[26] Michael Howard, "The use and Abuse of Military History," *Royal United Service Institute Journal*, 107, no. FEB (1962): 4-8,
[27] John Kiszely, "The Relevance of History to the Military Profession: a British View," *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession*, ed. Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 27.
[28] Luvaas, Jay. "Military History: Is it Still Practicable." *Parameters*, Summer 1995. http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/1995/luvaas.pdf (accessed April 11, 2014).
[29] Howard, *Use and Abuse of Military History*, 22.

Insurgency or Vietnam War, one might draw false conclusions about the nature of counterinsurgency operations. This could have negative implications in a different theater of operations today, by leading one to apply the wrong lessons. In addition to studying wars in context, Howard urged leaders to also study wars in width, and depth.[30] Avoiding the wrong lessons by approaching self-study with the "width, depth, and context" framework requires an individual to seek out knowledge and devote a serious amount of time and effort. By tapping into the collective knowledge base available in a professional military society, an individual could be guided and encouraged in these efforts by experts and more experienced members of the profession.

The second pitfall in self-study is a tendency to reinforce limited experiences and prejudices.[31] Because a program of self-study is an individual journey, leaders might drift towards subjects where they are comfortable and avoid titles that may offer opposing viewpoints or are outside their areas of expertise. As former professor of history at the U.S. Army War College and noted historian, Jay Luvaas, once wrote, "Each man reads his own lesson according to peculiar mind and mood."[32] Additionally, service reading lists are published with their particular domain of expertise (land, sea, or air) in mind, and leaders are rarely exposed to other titles that help develop a greater appreciation or understanding for what their sister services bring to the fight. Such selective reading risks advancing parochial prejudices. Because a professional military society would represent professional military education institutions and various service cultures, members would be exposed to various perspectives, thereby broadening their own. Furthermore, the combat experience of older

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[30] Ibid
[31] Kiszely, The Relevance of History to the Military Profession, 27.
[32] Luvaas, Military History: Is it Still Practicable, 85.

members of the profession could serve as a sounding board for conclusions drawn by those who may lack such experiences.

Additionally, the interactions encouraged by a professional military society could help individuals develop higher level thinking skills. Dr. Antulio J. Echevarria's essay *The Trouble with History,* argues that many military professionals focus on the accumulation of knowledge rather than analyzing and evaluating it.[33] Many service members tend to approach reading lists with a check list mentality, instead of using them to rigorously examine concepts and past events. By exploring books and articles and discussing them in a professional military society, individuals would be encouraged to move towards a more sophisticated understanding of the material, thus developing the critical thinking skills required of leaders at all levels.

A Modern-Day Professional Military Society

A modern-day professional military society should combine the structure and practices of the *Militarische Gesellschaft* and the Army online professional forums. This combination would leverage the intrinsic motivations of its individual members to create a "grass roots" atmosphere focused on the study of war and warfare. Additionally, because of the geographic dispersion of today's military, it could capitalize on the increased use of mobile devices for everyday tasks, and an ever-growing population of military leaders who have grown up using the internet.

Like Companycommand.mil and Platoonleader.mil, a society today must be built upon a structure that harnesses the power of formal and informal leadership. The formal leadership could work closely with senior leadership and professors from professional

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[33] Echevarria II, Antulio. "The Trouble with History." *Parameters*, Summer 1995. http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/articles/05summer/echevarr.pdf (accessed April 11, 2014).

military education to develop structured programs of study for society members. The informal leadership could serve as volunteer moderators and help drive conversations in the online forums. Each year, the society could offer four guided programs of study based on themes related to war and warfare. For example, one year the four guided programs might be *Operational Leadership*, *Military Adaptation and Innovation*, *Logistics in War*, and *Moral, Ethical, and Psychological Dimensions of War*. The programs of study could be developed into separate quarterly blocks of instruction so that leaders may join-in throughout the year. Each block could have a mixture of reading, discussion threads, and a live video session with a senior leader or expert in that particular field. Additionally, the guided programs would have to be developed with the assumption that most leaders have busy schedules that do not lend much time to outside endeavors. Members should also be organized into different online small groups each quarter, ensuring maximum networking and learning opportunities. When not participating in one of the guided programs of study, members will be able to post and answer questions on a private message board, connect with others to collaborate on articles for professional publication, and read and post reviews on books of interests, thus creating an ongoing professional discussion throughout one's career.

Conclusion

While the current system doesn't incentivize self-study, a professional military society built around the practice of the study of war and warfare would provide leaders with an external motivation for life-long learning. Membership in such a society would allow leaders to develop personal learning networks across all the services, providing instant access to a wealth of knowledge. Additionally, younger members of the profession could connect with more experienced members, opening opportunities for mentorship relationships to

develop, further shaping their own journey of professional growth. Because individuals will have opportunities to discuss what they are reading as well as participate in guided programs of study, they will avoid several of the pitfalls that might result from one-sided study. History has proven that a military society and online communities of practice greatly benefit members of the military profession by increasing their effectiveness throughout their careers. As the military looks towards a future of budgetary constraints, the profession needs to ensure that its members continue to hone their judgment in preparation for the day when they are called upon in service of the Nation. A community of life-long learners, like the one proposed in this paper, will guarantee that military leaders are mentally prepared to lead soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines into the 21st century.

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